

## Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

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R 201502Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 231

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 2641

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, CH

SUBJECT: SOVIET VIEWS ON CURRENT EVENTS IN CHINA

1. SUMMARY. POLITICAL COUNSELOR CALLED FEB 19 ON FEODOR I. POTAPENKO, NEW DEPUTY CHIEF OF THE SOVIET MFA'S FIRST FAR EAST DIVISION, TO DISCUSS CURRENT SOVIET THINKING ON CHINA. POTAPENKO TWICE CITES THE SECRETARY'S STATEMENT ABOUT THE DIFFICULTIES OF PREDICTING EVENTS IN CHINA AND WAS CAUTIOUS IN HIS ASSESSMENT OF HUA KUO-FENG'S APPOINTMENT AS ACTING PREMIER, OF TENG HSIAO-PING'S POSITION AND OF THE LIKELY EFFECTS OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS ON CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY (NEGLIGIBLE). HE SAID FLATLY THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO RECENT INCIDENTS ON THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER, THAT CHINA HAD ALSO DENIED THEM, AND HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND HOW THE CURRENT STORIES GOT STARTED. HE ALSO EXPLICITLY DENIED THAT

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THERE HAD BEEN A TRADE-OFF BY WHICH THE SOVIETS RELEASED

SOME CHINESE IN RETURN FOR THE SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW  
(SEPTTEL). END SUMMARY.

2. IN ANSWER TO POLITICAL COUNSELOR'S OPENING QUESTION ON CURRENT TURBULENCE, POTAPENKO BEGAN BY CITING SECRETARY KISSINGER'S RECENT COMMENT ON THE DIFFICULTIES OF PREDICTING DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINA. HE SAID THAT THE ONLY CERTAIN THING NOW WAS THAT THERE WAS "MUCH NOISE." THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NEW CAMPAIGN IS NOT YET CLEAR, HE EMPHASIZED, SAYING THAT EVEN THOUGH TENG HSAIO-PING WAS THE APPARENT TARGET, IT WAS TOO EARLY TO TELL WHAT EFFECT THE CAMPAIGN WOULD HAVE ON HIM. SO FAR THE POSTER CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT ONLY IN THE UNIVERSITIES, SAID POTAPENKO, AND IT HAS BEEN RELATIVELY ORDERLY, UNLIKE EVEN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. THE KEY POINT, HE SAID, IS THAT "MAO DOESN'T TRUST ANYONE." IT IS CLEAR THAT MAO SUPPORTS THE PRESENT CAMPAIGN EVEN IF HE DIDN'T ACTUALLY START IT. AS TO ITS TIMING, SO SOON AFTER CHOU EN-LAI'S DEATH, POTAPENKO POINTED OUT THAT THE ANTI-CONFUCIAN CAMPAIGN HAD BEGUN WELL BEFORE CHOU'S DEATH AND IT MAY HAVE BEEN AIMED AT CHOU AND HIS FELLOW "MODERATES", BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE DEATH OF CHOU GAVE IMPETUS TO THE PRESENT CAMPAIGN. POTAPENKO DID NOT DWELL ON THE QUESTION OF "FACTIONS" BUT SAID THAT THE MEDIA ARTICLES THUS FAR SHOW THAT THE LEFTISTS" CONTROL THE ORGANS OF PROPAGANDA, AND THEY REVEAL OPENLY THAT THERE ARE SPLITS IN THE TOP LEADERSHIP. (COMMENT. POTAPENKO'S ASSESSMENT WAS HIGHLY CAUTIOUS; HE SEEMED BY IMPLICATION TO ISOLATE THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE PROPAGANDA ORGANS AS THE LOCI OF THE CAMPAIGN; AND HE WAS UNWILLING TO GENERALIZE ABOUT ITS BROADER IMPLICATIONS EITHER FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF FOR THE COUNTRY AT LARGE. HE SEEMED AMUSED THAT A WESTERN PRESS REPORT HAD ATTRIBUTED TO KAPITSA A PREDICTION THAT TENG WOULD NOT BECOME PREMIER. END COMMENT

3. THE POSITION OF THE ARMY IS CRUCIAL, HE SAID, AND THE VOICES FROM THE MILITARY HAVE BEEN VERY QUIET IN RECENT WEEKS. THE ARMY, HE EMPHASIZED, IS NOT MERELY A MILITARY BUT A POLITICAL FORCE IN CHINA. ITS POLITICAL  
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VIEWS ARE ASSUMED TO BE "CENTRIST", AND ORDER-ORIENTED, HE SAID, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE ARMY ALSO. HE SAID THAT CHEN HSI-LIEN IS NOW SAID TO BE THE ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER BUT HE HAS NOT YET BEEN NAMED TO THE POST FORMALLY,. PRESUMABLY BECAUSE YAH CHIEN-YING IS STILL ALIVE. POTAPENKO DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN CHEN'S "ACTING" ROLE AND THAT OF HUA KUO-FENG AS ACTING PRIME MINISTER, ACCEPTING WITHOUT QUESTION THE

IDEA THAT HUA'S APPOINTMENT AS PREMIER WAS NOT CONDITIONAL BUT WAS SIMPLY AWAITING CONFIRMATION BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS. A NEW DEFENSE MINISTER, HE POINTED OUT, COULD BE APPOINTED BY THE STATE COUNCIL WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE NPC

4. TURNING TO HUA KUO-FENG, POTAPENKO EMPHASIZED THAT HE IS LARGELY UNKNOWN HIMSELF AND HAS ADOPTED NO CLEAR POSITIONS ON SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS. HIS PUBLIC SPEECHES HAVE BEEN FEW AND MOSTLY ON AGRICULTURE. PERHAPS IF HE HAD SPOKEN MORE, HE WOULD HAVE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION. WHEN POLITICAL COUNSELOR MENTIONED THE CAUTIOUSLY FAVORABLE COMMENT ON HUA IN THE TASS COMMENTARY LAST WEEK (MOSCOW 2230) POTAPENKO EMPHASIZED THAT IT WAS A TENTATIVE COMMENT BASED UPON LACK OF INFORMATION, NOT A JUDGMENT THAT HUA FAVORS BETTER SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS. HE SAID THAT HUA IS NOT EXPERIENCED IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND, THEREFORE, ONE MUST WAIT TO SEE HOW HE TALKS AND ACTS. TENG HSAIO-ING HAD A KNOWN POSITION AND WAS VERY VISIBLE, SINCE HE DEALT EXTENSIVELY WITH FOREIGNERS. POTAPENKO DISCOUNTED STORIES THAT HUA WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RELEASE OF THE SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW. AS PUBLIC SECURITY MINISTER, SAID POTAPENKO, HE WAS OBVIOUSLY ONE OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE "INVESTIGATION" OF THE INCIDENT, BUT A DECISION ON THE RELEASE COULD NOT POSSIBLY HAVE BEEN HIS ALONE.

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5. CONCERNING RECENT PRESS REPORTS AND THE TASS STATEMENT ON ALLEGED BORDER INCIDENTS, POTAPENKO SAID FLATLY THAT THERE HAVE BEEN NO RECENT INCIDENTS AT ALL. HE SAID THAT NCNA HAD ALSO DENIED THAT THERE HAD BEEN ANY INCIDENTS AND HAD SAID MERELY THAT CHINA WAS FULLY PREPARED TO DEFEND ITSELF. POTAPENKO SAID HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND HOW THE REPORTS OF INCIDENTS HAD ARISEN BUT THEY HAD NEVERTHELESS BEEN REPORTED IN WEST GERMANY AND, HE THOUGHT, IN HONG KONG. HE SAID THAT SUCH ALLEGED INCIDENTS WOULD RUN COUNTER TO CHINA'S CURRENT LINE THAT THE SOVIET UNION IS THREATENING WESTERN EUROPE AND THE U.S., AND HE COMENTED FAVORABLY ON JOSEPH KRAFT'S RECENT ARTICLE POINTING OUT THAT PEKING'S OBJECTIVE WAS TO HEIGHTEN HOSTILITY BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND THE UNITED STATES.

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6. RETURNING TO THE RECENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENTS, POTAPENKO SAID THAT THE MAIN LINES OF CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY WOULD PROBABLY NOT CHANGE MUCH, AND HE OFFERED AS A PERSONAL OPINION THAT THE SUCCESSOR LEADERSHIP MUST FOCUS ITS ATTENTION MAINLY ON INTERNAL AFFAIRS. THE FOOD-POPULATION RATIO IS THE MOST URGENT PROBLEM IN CHINA NOW, AS IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN, HE SAID. FOOD PRODUCTION HAS INCREASED IN RECENT YEARS BUT HAS MERELY KEPT PACE WITH POPULATION GROWTH OF 2-3 PERCENT PER YEAR. ANOTHER MAJOR PROBLEM FOR CHINA IS INTERNAL TRANSPORT, PARTICULARLY RAIL AND ROAD CONSTRUCTION. IT WAS "NOT ACCIDENTAL" THAT ECONOMIC QUESTIONS WERE CENTRAL IN THE DISCUSSIONS AT THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS A YEAR AGO SINCE IT IS ONLY THROUGH SOLVING THESE PROBLEMS THAT CHINA CAN ACHIEVE ITS AMBITION OF BECOMING A "GREAT POWER". BUT THE VIEWS OF THE LEADERS ON THESE ECONOMIC QUESTIONS ARE NOT UNITED AND THEY DO NOT AGREE ON METHODS. AFTER MAO, SAID POTAPENKO, THE SAME PROBLEMS WILL REMAIN AND THE SAME LINES OF ARGUMENT CAN BE EXPECTED ON THE BEST COURSE TOWARDS

MODERNIZATION. WANG HUNG-WEN AND THE "RADICALS" WOULD PROBABLY CONCENTRATE MORE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE. BUT THIS SECTOR CANNOT BE DEVELOPED WITHOUT INCREASED INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION OF THOSE ITEMS WHICH ASSIST AGRICULTURE, SUCH AS FARM MACHINERY AND A BETTER SYSTEM OF TRANSPORTATION. THE PROBLEM FACING CHINA IS THAT PRODUCTION IS TOO LOW IN ALL SECTORS.

7. COMMENT. POTAPENKO TWICE CITED SECRETARY KISSINGER'S RECENT COMMENT ON THE DIFFICULTIES OF PREDICTING DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINA AND WAS VERY CAUTIOUS IN HIS ASSESSMENT OF BOTH NEAR TERM AND LONGER RANGE CHINESE POLICIES. HE WAS NOTABLY MILD ON THE QUESTION OF "FACTIONS" AND DID NOT MENTION ANTI-SOVIETISM AS A FACTOR IN RECENT DEVELOPMENTS. LIKE ALL SOVIET SINO-LOGISTS, HE POINTED TO EVIDENCE OF "POWER STRUGGLE" IN THE CHINESE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP, BUT HE STAYED CLOSE TO PEKING'S OWN RECENT DISCUSSIONS AND TO THE LINES OF ANALYSIS IN THE WESTERN PRESS.  
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